

## WHY YOU SHOULD GET INVOLVED

Serious mental illness and substance abuse in a loved one often lead to feelings of hopelessness, especially when your loved one also goes to jail. One way to combat these feelings is to become involved in advocacy work - to **change the system** so that these vulnerable people get more appropriate care.

It begins with education - learning about the nature of mental illness and substance abuse, and about opportunities for systems change. Informed family members and friends of people with these co-occurring disorders can bring a **unique perspective** to programs and policies serving their loved ones.

## BUT, IT'S NOT ALWAYS EASY

Some of the **challenges** to becoming involved in systems change include:

- Some family members feel embarrassed or ashamed about having a family member with mental illness, substance abuse, and jail experience, and may be reluctant to become involved in public activities that could expose some very personal family situations.
- Family members may believe that there is little or nothing they can do that will *actually make a difference* in programs and policies affecting their loved ones.
- Some family members may feel as though their efforts are not welcomed by service providers or policy makers, or that when their input is solicited, this solicitation is for "public relations" value only.
- Sometimes it is difficult for family members to think about long-term solutions when there are so many immediate crises.
- Many family members simply do not know what to do to get started.

## HOW DO YOU GET INVOLVED?

- **Join with members of other families in similar situations**, in support groups and in advocacy activities (such as those offered by local chapters of the Alliance for the Mentally Ill or Al-Anon Family Groups), which can reduce feelings of embarrassment or shame. This involvement can also help to create a support base, which may be valuable in times of crisis.
- **Become informed on the nature of mental illness and substance abuse**, and on how treatment programs for these co-occurring disorders might be improved for people in the criminal justice system. This will help families become valuable members of the systems change team.
- **Get public exposure** for this issue to help bring about systems change. This may include writing to police commissioners, judges, elected officials, newspapers, and local television stations. It may also include appearing on television or radio shows.
- **Participate in advocacy activities** to help family members understand what, realistically, can be accomplished when family members, consumers, service providers and policy-makers work together for systems change. This may include serving on a committee or a task force.
- **Write to legislative representatives** about increasing funds for jail diversion and in-jail treatment programs, and changing state laws and local policies regarding the care and treatment of people with co-occurring disorders in the criminal justice system.

## EXAMPLES OF SUCCESS

- Members of the *San Diego Alliance for the Mentally Ill* successfully brought together representatives from the Police Department and County Mental Health Services to form a Psychiatric Emergency Response Team, which provides emergency services for people with mental illness and works to prevent inappropriate incarceration.
- In *Montgomery County, Pennsylvania*, family members and consumers serve on a *Forensic Task Force* with representatives from criminal justice, mental health, substance abuse and the courts. The Task Force has the authority to implement changes in all systems affecting people with severe mental illness. The Montgomery County Emergency Service (MCES) has been identified as a "model program" by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and by *American Jails* magazine.
- Family members serve on forensic advocacy committees at the national and state levels, working together to provide technical assistance to families, professionals and policy-makers on legislative issues on both state and national levels across the country.

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**Families can be advocates, helping service systems acquire the financial and political resources needed to improve the system.**

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## RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

### **Al-Anon Family Groups**

P.O. Box 862, Midtown Station  
New York, NY 10018-0862  
212/302-7240

### **Center for Mental Health Services Knowledge Exchange Network**

P.O. Box 42490  
Washington, DC 20015  
800/789-2647

### **Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health**

1021 Prince Street  
Alexandria, VA 22314-2971  
703/684-7710

### **Human Interaction Research Institute**

18111 Nordhoff Street  
Northridge, CA 91330-8245  
818/677-2550

### **National Alliance for the Mentally Ill**

200 North Glebe Road, Suite 1015  
Arlington, VA 22203-3754  
703/524-7600; e-mail: nami@aol.com

### **National Depressive and Manic-Depressive Association**

730 North Franklin Street, Suite 501  
Chicago, IL 60610  
312/642-0049

### **National Institute of Corrections Community Corrections Division**

500 1st Street, 7th Floor  
Washington, DC 20534  
800/995-6423

### **National Institute of Corrections Jail Division**

1960 Industrial Circle, Suite A  
Longmont, CO 80501  
800/995-6429

### **National Mental Health Association**

1021 Prince Street  
Alexandria, VA 22314  
800/965-NMHA

### **PRIDE**

50 Hurt Plaza, Suite 210  
Atlanta, GA 30303  
404/577-4500

### **PROTOTYPES Systems Change Center**

5601 West Slauson Avenue, #200  
Culver City, CA 90230  
310/641-7795

## ABOUT THE GAINS CENTER

The National GAINS Center for People with Co-Occurring Disorders in the Justice System was established in 1995. The Center gathers information about mental health and substance abuse services provided in the justice system, tailors materials to the specific needs of localities, and provides technical assistance to help them plan, implement and operate appropriate, cost-effective programs.

The GAINS Center is a Federal partnership between two centers of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration -- the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment and the Center for Mental Health Services -- and the National Institute of Corrections.

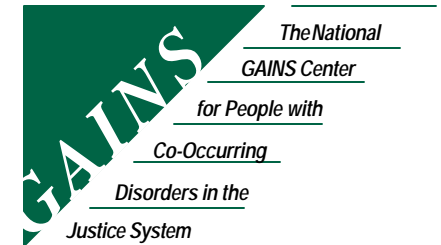
The GAINS Center is operated by Policy Research, Inc. in collaboration with the Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute. For more information, contact:



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*Produced by Human Interaction Research Institute  
in collaboration with The GAINS Center.*



# INVOLVING FAMILIES IN SYSTEMS CHANGE:

**IMPROVING SERVICES  
FOR PEOPLE WITH  
CO-OCCURRING DISORDERS  
IN THE CRIMINAL AND  
JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEMS**

*Strategies for Families*

